



BLUEPRINT UPDATE

Successes Achieved in Strengthening Families & Re-aligning Arizona's Child Welfare System

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Fall 2006

TOP CPS IMPROVEMENTS

FY2003-2006

- Children protected from abuse and neglect through in-home and out-of-home services increased by almost 43%.
- The number of available foster homes increased by about 50% and the DES processing time for a completed foster home application was cut in half.
- Finalized adoptions increased by more than 59%.
- Permanent guardianships increased by 86%.
- The number of children returned safely to their parents increased by almost 64% (including a 28% increase in the past year).
- Annual growth in the number of children in out-of-home care decreased from 19% to 2%.

FY2005-2006

- The number of children in settings such as group homes and shelters decreased by almost 16%.
- The number of children 6 years old or younger in group homes decreased by almost 62%.
- The number of children 3 years old or younger in shelters decreased by 55%.
- Number of filled Child Protective Services case manager positions increased by almost 10%.

Blueprint's First Year Shows Progress Made in Child Protection & Permanency

As Director of the Department of Economic Security, one area I am frequently asked about is Child Protective Services (CPS). The most common question asked is, has anything changed at CPS? My answer is always an emphatic *Yes!*

In these four pages, you will learn more about the tremendous progress that has been made in protecting children, in strengthening families, in finding permanent homes for children whose families couldn't keep them safe, and in providing more support to those who work hard to make child and family well-being a priority in our state.

You'll read about foster youth—survivors of abuse—whose voices are changing the way group homes are monitored.

You'll read about efforts to help those interested in joining our team to make the decision about whether CPS is right for them. And, you will read about the recognition Arizona is receiving as a state on the cutting edge of child welfare reform.

There's still a long way to go. But, in the ongoing commitment to support families and protect children, we need to celebrate successes. We can celebrate those achievements and use them to motivate us to keep changing, keep growing and keep succeeding. I hope you will find these pages as inspiring as I do, and that you will join us in our efforts.

Tracy L. Wareing

More Children in Family-Like Settings

In the fall of 2005, the Division of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) published *Strengthening Families: A Blueprint for Re-Aligning Arizona's Child Welfare System*.

The Blueprint outlined plans for safely decreasing the number of children who came into the state's care because of abuse and neglect and reducing the number of children, particularly young children, placed in group homes and shelters.

The progress made in these areas in such a short time has been phenomenal, particularly in the number of children in group homes and shelters, which decreased by an amazing 15.7%. The Division exceeded its original goal by 57%.

Much of this decrease can be attributed to the dedicated efforts of CPS case managers and supervisors, who work diligently to ensure children coming into care are placed in family-like settings and

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Young Children in Group Homes & Shelters Decreasing

(Continued from page 1)

who partner with group home and shelter staff to ensure that children in those placements transition to family-like settings as soon as possible. A great deal of credit also goes to CPS' partners in foster and adoptive parent recruitment agencies statewide. Their work ensures that homes are available for vulnerable children.

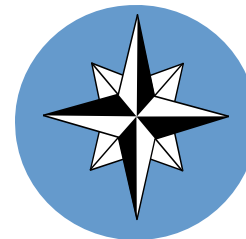
Due to the Division's continued focus on providing services in the

home when safe to do so, and ongoing efforts to increase the number of foster homes available to accept children in the evening or on weekends, in the future, young children will only be placed in group homes or shelters under limited circumstances.

The decrease in the total number of children in group homes and shelters is the result of work done on behalf of the youngest children. The number of children three and younger placed in shelters decreased

by an amazing 55% and the number of children six and younger placed in group homes decreased by 62%. There are some situations where being placed in a group home can enhance child well-being. Of the 49 children six and under in group homes on June 30, 31 were there because they were the child of a teenage parent also in the group home, or were with their older siblings.

The Division expects to report additional progress in these areas soon.



Since June 2005, the number of children in group homes or shelters decreased by almost 16%; the number of children under seven in group homes decreased by almost 62% and the number of children under four in shelters decreased by 55%.

Video Helps Job Seekers Assess Fit With CPS Case Manager Challenges, Rewards

A CPS case manager's job is both challenging and rewarding. For the right person, it's the toughest job they'll ever love.

That's the message behind a new realistic job preview video CPS launched in May. Case managers who have left the job often cite as the reason that the job wasn't what they thought it would be. DES will be able to retain more staff if they know what they are getting in to ahead of time.

Arizona is one of four states nationwide to use this type of video in its recruitment efforts. The video and other efforts to improve worker recruitment and retention have been well received by job seekers as well as national advocates working to increase the number of child welfare workers.

As part of the Governor's Action Plan for CPS Reform, a dedicated group has been working on strategies in recruitment, improving

working conditions and expanding training for workers. These strategies are making a difference. Staff turnover decreased from 25.4% in the first half of the 2006 fiscal year to 21.4% in the second half of the year, and the number of filled CPS case manager positions has increased by 10% over the past year.

The 24-minute video is available online at: www.azdes.gov/dcyf/cmdps/cps/cpsvideo.asp.

Youth Voices Making A Difference, Changing How Group Homes Are Monitored

The voices of foster youth— young adults who survived abuse and neglect as children and spent portions of their childhoods in foster care—are informing and guiding reform efforts.

Comments and suggestions from youth have influenced some critical changes at CPS, including case manager training; how placement decisions are made and case plans are developed in families with older children; and now, the way that group homes are monitored.

During a bimonthly meeting between Governor Janet Napolitano and former foster youth, the young adults said that announced visits by state licensing workers resulted in potential violations not being identified. They also said youth living in group homes might be intimidated by licensing workers and not want to share their concerns.

David Matthews, who oversees DES' licensing unit, said that policies have been changed to require at

least one unannounced licensing visit per year (more if violations are found) and that youth are starting to accompany inspectors on some visits.

"Every inspector has a goal of having youth accompany them on at least one licensing visit per month," Matthews said. "We are getting the wrinkles ironed out, but overall, this has been a real eye-opener for us. They have given us insight that only someone who has experienced group home life could."

AZ Selected As Anchor for National Family-to-Family Effort

At a national leadership conference in May, the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) announced that Arizona will become a regional anchor site for the group's Family to Family initiative.

AECF, in consultation with community leaders and child welfare practitioners nationwide, developed Family to Family in order to address national child welfare issues and reform. The fundamental goals of the initiative are to keep children in their homes with proper supports to keep them safe; strengthen the network of families available to care for abused and neglected children in their own

communities; build partnerships with at-risk neighborhoods toward that end; and, track outcomes for children and families so that child welfare systems can better learn from their experiences.



Family to Family includes strategies and tools to help strengthen families and communities.

AECF selected 15 sites in 10 states nationwide to be anchor sites. Sites were selected based on where their states are in terms of child welfare reform and practice. Arizona's selection acknowledges progress made in recent years including the focus on family-centered practice, the continued development of

alternatives to keep kids safe and provide in-home services to prevent removal, the reduction of children placed in institutions, and the increase in the number of children who have found permanency through adoption and guardianship.

As an anchor site, Arizona will receive additional resources, technical assistance and evaluation. Once Family to Family is fully implemented in the state, Arizona will become a regional "training ground," where other states working to implement Family to Family can come for information and inspiration. To learn more about Family to Family, please visit <http://www.aecf.org>.

Making Connections to Help Strengthen Families, Protect Kids

The quotation on the right is from a real mom who was facing a real crisis. "Cindy" had no job, no means to support her four children, no transportation and no hope. These factors often lead families into situations where they are likely to become involved with Child Protective Services. That's where Family Connections comes in. Through Family Connections, Cindy found a job, got connected to other support services, began collecting child support and even had a van discounted by a local car dealer.

This is one of many success stories realized since Family Connections teams started at DES in January 2005. Family Connections engages families eligible for Cash Assistance and at-risk

of involvement with CPS in comprehensive, integrated services with the goal of helping families achieve self-sufficiency, safety and overall well-being. Family Connections links families to community resources that will help them reach their highest potential. Services are family-focused, strengths-based and voluntary.

There are now ten Family Connections teams in Pima and Maricopa counties (up from six one year ago). The teams are composed of a team lead, a CPS specialist, a specialist in family assistance programs, an employment specialist and a case aide. Four teams include a domestic violence advocate and focus on victims of domestic violence in shelters. Six teams focus on families already involved or

potentially involved with CPS by supporting families that are exiting the CPS system; working with neighborhoods to get them more involved with abused and neglected children in their communities via the Family to Family initiative; and, better supporting relatives caring for children.

Family Connections teams are important tools for helping some of the most at-risk families build on their individual and collective strengths to improve their life chances and avoid becoming involved with costlier, and less effective, systems of care. Expansion of the Family Connections model is a critical component of ongoing efforts to protect children and strengthen families.



I wanted to thank the whole Family Connections (team) for helping our family out and other families, as well. It's (because of) people like you who have hearts for others that we have hope to keep going on with our family. Me and my children wanted to thank you for all you have done for us.
Sincerely, Cindy

Shelters to Expand Role in Child Protection

The Division of Children, Youth and Families has had great success in reducing the number of young children placed in group homes and shelters (see story on page 1). The care provided in group homes and shelters is excellent, but the most appropriate setting for most children, especially those under six years old, is in a family environment, such as a foster home.

The recent success in placing young children in family settings, however, has raised a new challenge – how to best utilize the resources of shelters to serve at-risk children and their families. By the end of December, several shelter care partners will be helping the Division try out a small test of change. In addition to providing temporary care to abused and neglected children, these facilities will expand their work to provide receiving, assessment and

visitation services to children and families.

Receiving center services provide transitional care for children following removal from their home for up to 24 hours while awaiting placement in a foster home or kinship home. Services include physical and behavioral health assessments, and a compilation of information to accompany the child to their next placement.

Assessment services involve providing support over a period of no more than three days so that a relative or other care provider can make plans – such as arranging for child care or changing their work schedule – to accommodate a child being placed in their home.

The visitation services will allow visits between children, their birth families, siblings and significant others in a family-like atmosphere that includes a sitting area, playroom, nap area and outside play area. Staff at the facility will oversee the visit to ensure the

child's safety and will observe interactions between family members, assess parenting skills, provide training and intervention, and document the visit.

Many of the facilities involved in this test of change already provide some of these services to children in their care who are not involved with Child Protective Services. The Division is pleased to be able to partner with shelters to expand their role in keeping children safe. The facilities involved include the West Valley Child Crisis Center, the Crisis Nursery and the Child Crisis Center – East Valley in Maricopa County and Casa de los Niños in Pima County.

If this test of change proves effective in terms of outcomes for children and families, information gleaned will be used to change the way the Division contracts for these services statewide.

Foster Home License Application Goes Online!

This fall, DES launched Quick Connect to allow new foster home applications and renewals to be submitted online. The system is the result of discussions with a subcommittee of the Governor's Commission on CPS Reform and is aimed at reducing the amount of redundant paperwork for new and on-going foster parents.

The process used to require applicants to fill out 60 pages of information, with many questions repeated throughout the various forms. With the new system, applicants only have to input their information once. They can fill out the information all at once, or they can fill it out over several days. The system is available in the evenings and on weekends.

"We listened to what foster parents and licensing agencies said would make the process easier for them, and designed Quick Connect with them in mind," said David Matthews, administrator of the DES Office of



Online applications are the result of foster parent and community agency input.

Licensing, Certification and Regulation. "We don't want folks tied up with duplicative paperwork; we want the agency staff out looking for new foster homes or supporting existing ones, and we want foster parents engaged with the children they care for."

Quick Connect does not replace the critical face-to-face parts of the certification

process. Applicants still must attend orientation, complete the required training and comply with safety measures, like background checks and home studies.

Contract agencies have used Quick Connect for about 20% of applications since November 1. By July 2007, all applications will be done online and the processing time for a new application will be less than 10 days.

Matthews presented Quick Connect at a national conference of human care licensing agencies.

"They were blown away by what Arizona has achieved in such a short time," Matthews said. "We were very proud of what we accomplished with our foster parents and community partners."



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AND FAMILY IN
ARIZONA WILL BE SAFE
AND ECONOMICALLY
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Strengthening Families: A Blueprint for Re-Aligning Arizona's Child Welfare System was published in September 2005 by the Department of Economic Security's Division of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF). The *Blueprint* was created as a more detailed, second step to the strategies outlined in the 2003 *Governor's Action Plan for CPS Reform*.

Blueprint Update is the first in a series of periodic newsletters to highlight the progress made and successes achieved in meeting the *Blueprint* goals of protecting children and strengthening families. To read the full text of the *Blueprint*, please visit:

<http://www.azdes.gov/dcyf/cmdps/cps/default.asp>

Electronic copies of this update, as well as future updates, also will be available at that site.

Improving Child Welfare's Response to Methamphetamine

In the past year, significant progress has been made in improving substance abuse treatment services and giving CPS case managers additional tools and training to deal with the increasing number of cases involving methamphetamine abuse.

According to the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (SAMHSA-CSAT), treatment for individuals addicted to meth can be just as effective as treatment for those addicted to

other kinds of drugs, if the treatment has the correct components. One model noted by CSAT for its success is called Matrix. Matrix relies on intensive behavioral therapy,

family education, counseling, social support groups and drug testing in outpatient settings.

The Division's substance abuse program, Arizona Families FIRST, embraces these best practices strategies and has integrated components of the model in its service delivery. In several areas of the state, providers are using this model. During the upcoming year, Families FIRST will support local communities in efforts to strengthen and enhance interventions for families impacted by meth. This may include development of strategies like peer mentoring, trauma recovery, parent/child treatment, sober housing for families, or implementation of evidenced based treatment models such as Matrix.

The Division also convened a panel of experts from substance abuse organizations, behavioral health

agencies, universities and others to improve the system's response to families impacted by meth in order to ensure child safety and well-being. This collaboration has resulted in improvements to the CPS case manager training curriculum and the development of tools to help case managers better identify substance-related issues and engage families in treatment and support services.

Training provided by experts in the field was held statewide for more than 1,000 CPS staff and other stakeholders. This training increased awareness of the impact of meth abuse and bolstered participants' skills in engaging and providing services to families.



Thanks to an additional \$2 million in funding appropriated for 2007, Families FIRST will expand this year for the first time since its inception.